

Message Text

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SUBJ: MARCH UNEMPLOYMENT STATISTICS - SOME IMPROVEMENT

REF: CANBERRA 2186; 01051; 02682 AND 02549

1. SUMMARY: UNEMPLOYMENT REGISTERED A DROP DURING MARCH. STATISTICAL DATA RELEASED BY THE AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS (ABS) SHOWED A FULL PERCENTAGE POINT DECREASE FROM FEBRUARY'S UNPRECEDENTED 7.3 PERCENT HIGH. THERE WERE 345,300 UNEMPLOYED OF 6.3 PERCENT OF THE FULL TIME LABOR FORCE. COMPANION DATA ISSUED BY COMMONWEALTH EMPLOYMENT SERVICE (CES) ALSO SHOWED A DECREASE. MINISTER FOR EMPLOYMENT AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS SAID THE SEASONAL DECREASE WAS IN LINE WITH PRIME MINISTER FRASER'S PREDICTION THAT UNEMPLOYMENT WOULD PEAK DURING FEBRUARY AND THEN FALL. OPPOSITION A.L.P. SPOKESMAN SAID THAT UNEMPLOYMENT IS STILL UNCLASSIFIED

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84,000 HIGHER THAN A YEAR AGO AND WOULD REACH 10 PERCENT UNLESS THE GOVERNMENT TOOK POSITIVE ACTION TO HEAD THIS OFF.

2. WHILE THE CONTINUED ISSUANCE OF TWO SETS OF UNEMPLOYMENT STATISTICS CONTINUES TO MUDDY THE WATERS, THE MARCH DATA RELEASED ON APRIL 7 GIVES SOME REASONS FOR OPTIMISM. ACCORDING TO A.B.S., UNEMPLOYMENT AMOUNTED TO 345,300 OR

6.3 PERCENT OF THE FULL TIME LABOR FORCE COMPARED TO FEBRUARY'S 395,800 WHICH REPRESENTED 7.3 PERCENT OF THE FULL TIME LABOR FORCE OF 5,449,500. A FURTHER 75,700 PEOPLE, INCLUDING 57,400 FEMALES WERE LOOKING FOR PART-TIME WORK. PART-TIME LABOR FORCE IS ESTIMATED TO APPROXIMATELY 960,000.

3. C.E.S. FIGURES ISSUED SIMULTANEOUSLY SHOWED 409,000 UNEMPLOYED OR 6.4 PERCENT OF THE LABOR FORCE. THIS REPRESENTED A REDUCTION OF 21,262 AND A PERCENTAGE REDUCTION FROM 6.9 PERCENT TO 6.4 PERCENT.

4. THE NUMBER RECEIVING UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS 290,356 WAS THE HIGHEST FOR THE MONTH OF MARCH SINCE THE DEPRESSION OF THE 1930'S. THIS FIGURE, HOWEVER, IS A FALL OF 8,099 IN THE FEBRUARY FIGURE OF THIS YEAR.

5. THE MINISTER FOR EMPLOYMENT AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS, MR. ANTHONY STREET SAID THAT THE GOVERNMENT PREFERENCES THE A.B.S. DATA BECAUSE ACCORDING TO ALL RELEVANT INFORMATION AVAILABLE "THEY ARE THE BEST ON THE EMPLOYMENT SITUATION". (THESE ESTIMATES ARE DERIVED FROM A MONTHLY POPULATION SURVEY BASED ON A MULTI-STAGE AREA SAMPLE OF PRIVATE - AND NON PRIVATE DWELLINGS; ABOUT 30,000 HOUSES, FLATS, PLUS HOTELS AND MOTELS, ETC.).

6. MR. STREET, IN A PRESS CONFERENCE ON APRIL 7 ALSO SAID THE UNCLASSIFIED

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GENERAL UNEMPLOYMENT SITUATION SHOWED A SEASONAL FALL AND WAS IN KEEPING WITH THE PREDICTION MADE BY PRIME MINISTER FRASER LATE LAST YEAR THAT UNEMPLOYMENT WOULD PEAK DURING FEBRUARY AND THEN BEGIN TO FALL.

7. MR. STREET WENT ON TO SAY THAT WESTERN AUSTRALIA AND SOUTH AUSTRALIA HAD RECORDED FIGURES WHICH WERE IN KEEPING WITH PROBLEMS CAUSED BY THE LIVESTOCK DISPUTE UNION BAN (SEE EMBASSY TELEGRAMS 02682 AND 02549). ALL STATES, HOWEVER, SHOWED A DECLINE IN UNEMPLOYMENT.

8. OPPOSITION SPOKESMAN MR. MICHAEL YOUNG, SAID INTER ALIA, THAT THE DROP IN NUMBERS OF UNEMPLOYED WAS NORMAL FOR THIS TIME OF YEAR, BUT IT WAS FROM A MUCH HIGHER PEAK THAN LAST YEAR.

9. THE MONTHLY FALL WAS SUBSTANTIALLY SMALLER THAN PREVIOUS YEARS, BEING 4.9 PERCENT COMPARED WITH FALLS OF 5.8 PERCENT IN 1977 AND 8.5 PERCENT IN 1976.

10. "UNEMPLOYMENT IS STILL 132,000 HIGHER THAN TWO YEARS AGO AND 84,000 HIGHER THAN 12 MONTHS AGO," MR. YOUNG SAID.

"THE NUMBER OF UNEMPLOYED HAS REACHED RECORD LEVELS. THERE ARE NOW 21 JOBLESS FOR EVERY VACANCY COMPARED WITH 14 JOBLESS FOR EVERY VACANCY IN MARCH LAST YEAR." "OUR PREDICTION THAT UNEMPLOYMENT WILL REACH 10 PERCENT UNLESS THE GOVERNMENT TAKES POSITIVE ACTION STILL STANDS."

11. DURING MARCH THE C.E.S. REGISTERED FALL OFF OF 21,262 OR 4.9 PERCENT UNEMPLOYED SEEKING FULL TIME WORK COMPARED WITH A FALL OF 20,119 OR 5.8 PERCENT IN MARCH 1977.

12. UNFILLED VACANCIES FELL DURING MARCH BY 2,734 OR 12.3 PERCENT TO A LEVEL OF 19,523. IN MARCH 1977, VACANCIES FELL BY 5,402 (18.7 PERCENT) TO 23,468.

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13. DURING MARCH A TOTAL OF 152,783 PERSONS REGISTERED FOR EMPLOYMENT WITH THE C.E.S. WERE EITHER PLACED OR THEIR APPLICATIONS LAPSED. REFERRALS TO EMPLOYERS TOTALLED 105,574.

14. THE SEASONALLY ADJUSTED FIGURE FOR OVERTIME DECREASED FROM 2.6 HOURS PER EMPLOYEE IN JANUARY TO 2.3 HOURS IN FEBRUARY. ALSTON

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